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Letter dated 6 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On instructions of the Government of my country, the Syrian Arab Republic, in its capacity as a concerned State, I wish to make the following comments regarding the twenty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities, which was circulated by a letter dated 17 January 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011), and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/14/Rev.1).

My Government notes with pleasure and a sense of optimism the qualitative improvement in the content of the reports of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. The Team has taken into account numerous pieces of intelligence and analysis that it was able to gather in the previous months as a result of communication and cooperation with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. That communication and cooperation became much stronger following the visit of the Team to Damascus on 21 and 22 November 2017. The members of the Team met with representatives of several Syrian Government counter-terrorism agencies.

My Government welcomes the report's focus on the ongoing threat posed by the terrorist organization Nusrah Front (QDe.137) to regional and international peace and security. As stated in the report, the Nusrah Front is the strongest, largest and most dangerous military affiliate of the Al-Qaida organization, and it has thousands of foreign terrorist fighters in its ranks. The Syrian Arab Republic firmly believes that eliminating the organization would require an immediate end to the various forms of financial and military support that it continues to receive, directly or indirectly, from the Governments of certain States, foremost among which are Qatar and Turkey.

Accordingly, the Syrian Arab Republic does not agree with the assessment made in paragraph 18 of the report that the Nusrah Front is self-sufficient in terms of financing. That assessment negates, and indeed fails even to consider, that foreign funding could play a part. The Nusrah Front is still receiving direct financial support from the Governments of certain States, foremost among which, as stated above, are Qatar and Turkey. It also receives funding and donations from numerous other countries, particularly in the Arab Gulf region. Moreover, hundreds of so-called charitable associations and civil society organizations located in the areas controlled by the Nusrah Front are masquerading as humanitarian organizations while they are

in fact affiliated with the group. Those entities receive funds from abroad, especially through donations and other financing that are indulged, facilitated or simply ignored by the Governments of the countries in question.

Similarly, numerous cross-border humanitarian assistance convoys, especially those entering from Turkey, are still being used as a means to transport weapons, funds and logistical, food or medical assistance to the armed terrorist groups, particularly the terrorist organization Nusrah Front. This is because the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic has been ineffective in fulfilling its mandate to monitor and oversee the loading of the convoys, inspect their contents and monitor their journey from Turkish territory until their final destination on Syrian territory. Indeed, the food, medical and medicinal supplies transported in humanitarian assistance convoys are still ultimately falling into the hands of the armed terrorist groups. The international community as a whole is still mindful of what happened when the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo city were liberated from the groups. The warehouses that were under terrorist control in those neighbourhoods were stocked with dozens of tons of such supplies, which were being withheld from the people who needed them, or were being sold to them at unaffordable prices, or were being kept for terrorist leaders and operatives and their families.

The report rightly states that the armed terrorist groups, particularly ISIL and the Nusrah Front, have looted cultural and religious heritage and artefacts in the Syrian Arab Republic with a view to trafficking them and smuggling them abroad for sale to Western buyers. In that regard, my Government wishes to stress that the customs and security authorities that control the borders in neighbouring States, particularly Turkey, are still to this day either complicit or indulgent as regards the cross-border smuggling of Syrian artefacts and heritage. In point of fact, my Government wishes to transmit highly credible intelligence to the effect that the terrorist groups that are active in the area of Jawbar, near Damascus, cooperated with the Turkish and Israeli intelligence services to loot artefacts and manuscripts from the ancient synagogue there. The items were then taken to the town of Kafr Batna in Rif Dimashq before being smuggled through local and foreign intermediaries to Istanbul, where they were received by antiquities experts who certified that they were extremely valuable antique objects. The items were subsequently smuggled to New York.

The Syrian Arab Republic asserts its sovereign right under international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council to recover all of the cultural assets that have been stolen, including those from the Jawbar synagogue. For that purpose, it is open and willing to cooperate with the Team and with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and to provide and exchange additional information in that regard.

My Government would like to lodge an official protest in respect of paragraph 62, entitled "Impact assessment", and to state that it categorically rejects the substance thereof. Without justification, the Team took a political position in that paragraph, something that it had never done in its previous reports, by praising the counter-terrorism efforts of Saudi Arabia, which, according to the report, had convened the first meeting of the Council of the Ministers of Defence of the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition, a coalition of 41 Member States dedicated to fighting ISIL. In that same paragraph, the Team also praised Turkey for having taken measures aimed at denying ISIL access to the financial system as well as its generation of funds and to disrupt the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and funds through middlemen or facilitators.

In its previous 20 reports, the Team clearly and consistently took a purely technical approach and avoided directly criticizing any State for supporting terrorism

or directly praising any State for its counter-terrorism efforts. In the opinion of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, it makes no sense that United Nations organs have not yet made any effort to identify the root causes of the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon and the reasons for its spread. It is also puzzling why those organs have failed to investigate the involvement of specific Governments and intelligence agencies in that phenomenon. That notwithstanding, the Syrian Government finds it strange and unacceptable that the Team should now praise the efforts of Governments that support and finance terrorism in Syria and Iraq, and that bear primary responsibility for the rise and spread of the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon.

The Syrian Arab Republic therefore wishes to make it known that it objects to and absolutely rejects paragraph 62, and officially calls for that paragraph to be deleted in full. If the paragraph is not deleted, then my country's delegation will object to the inclusion of any reference to the Team's twenty-first report in any future draft resolution or United Nations report.

The Syrian Arab Republic notes that the twenty-first report includes more than one reference to persons and entities that are not on Security Council lists but have close ties with listed terrorist groups, such as ISIL and the Nusrah Front. This is a very important matter and highlights the need for the Team to conduct in-depth studies of the many extremist armed groups that are not listed. Doing so would enable the Team to understand that those groups are linked to listed terrorist entities and that they share the same extremist ideology, violent agenda and terrorist identity. In fact, those groups are working together to expand their operations on a global scale, thereby threatening international peace and security. As the concerned Member State, the Syrian Arab Republic stands ready to assist the Team in that regard and invites it to assess and study the situation of and the links between the many armed terrorist groups that are active in Syrian territory with support and funding from the Governments of certain Member States. Those groups include such armed groups as the Army of Islam, which is backed by Saudi Arabia, the Rahman Corps, which is backed by Qatar, and the Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement, which is backed by Turkey and Qatar. The latter group is linked financially to ISIL, with which it splits the funds obtained from certain border crossing points that it controls. These extremist armed groups have organizational and financial ties with the ISIL terrorist organization, with which they split the funds they derive from stealing artefacts and oil, and from the "tariffs" they collect at border crossings and checkpoints. To this day, they maintain strategic military relations with the Nusrah Front terrorist organization, including alliances and partnerships, chain of command and coordination of terrorist military activity on the ground in various parts of Syria.

With regard to paragraph 66, my Government would like to make it clear that when the Panel's experts visited Syria on 20 and 21 November 2017, they were informed that armed terrorist groups had raided immigration and passport offices in several parts of the country and seized some 9,700 blank Syrian passports. Moreover, ISIL is not the only terrorist organization that seized blank passports. Other terrorist groups, at the forefront of which is the Nusrah Front terrorist organization, engaged in this terrorist activity. Thus, it is not only ISIL terrorists who might misuse those passports, but also the members of the various other armed terrorist groups that are active in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that the resolutions of the Security Council concerning counter-terrorism are effective tools in the effort to curb and eliminate the threat of terrorism. However, the real problem continues to be the lack of genuine desire on the part of the Governments of certain Member States to comply with those resolutions, some of which were adopted under Chapter VII, and the insistence of others on using terrorism as a political and military weapon to

intervene in the affairs of States. One must keep in mind that the sanctions list and the measures stipulated in the resolutions of the Security Council concerning counter-terrorism apply to anyone who facilitates or is involved in the financing of acts of terrorism, even if the person is the representative of a government, a State or an intelligence agency.

Syria will therefore continue to call upon the specialized agencies of the United Nations to look into the reasons and factors that truly gave rise to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, and to identify the Governments, intelligence agencies and other actors that are behind a phenomenon that now threatens international peace and security.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative